

Executive Officer's Statement
California Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board

September 24, 2004

Revenue Collection Begins for Government Claims Program

Two key changes to the Government Claims (GC) Program of the Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board became effective on August 16, 2004 as a result of the Budget Act of 2004. The GC Program implemented a \$25 filing fee for claimants presenting claims against the State and a surcharge against agencies in the amount of 15 percent of each claim approved by the Board. The surcharge applies to claims paid after August 16, 2004, including those in the Omnibus Claims Bill (AB 3118). As required by statute and emergency regulations, claimants may apply for a fee waiver on the basis of financial hardship.

The Board collected approximately \$1,200 in filing fees from 58 claimants in the first month that the \$25 fee was implemented. Significant enhancements to the GC data processing system, telephone system, and website have helped staff members answer questions about the changes. Because the filing fee is new, a GC staff member has telephoned each person who files a claim without enclosing the fee to explain the new procedure. Few requests for a fee waiver have been filed, but staff members anticipate a number of waiver requests from claimants who are inmates.

The Board will begin to receive revenue from the surcharge by early October. Revenues from the surcharges included in AB 3118, which was recently signed by the Governor, are expected to be about \$170,000.

Executive Officer Participates on Attorney General's Task Force on Domestic Violence

Probation officers, law enforcement officers, victim advocates, and prosecutors testified on a range of issues at the Regional Hearing of the Attorney General's Task Force on Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence (Task Force) in Fresno on August 31, 2004. Karen McGagin, Executive Officer of the Board, is a member of the Task Force and attended the hearing. Testimony focused on three important areas of the system's response to domestic violence: emergency protective orders and restraining orders, misdemeanor prosecutions, and batterer's intervention programs.

The Board helps victims of domestic violence who need to relocate, seek medical treatment, and find mental health counseling, forming a crucial strand in a safety net made up of protective orders, prosecution, and other forms of intervention. The hearing offered an opportunity to highlight many of the best practices being implemented to help victims around the state as well as a chance to learn how the system needs to be improved.

The next hearing will take place in Redding on October 6. More information about the work of the Task Force is available at www.safestate.org.

New Outreach Materials Introduced in August

Three outreach efforts debuted at the Board in August. The first issue of the Victim Compensation Connection, the Board's new newsletter, was published. It featured an article on the rate increases the Board approved at the August meeting and an article on the over \$1 million the Board collected in partnership with the California Department of Corrections and the Franchise Tax Board. The newsletter will be widely distributed among victim advocates, law enforcement officers, prosecutors and others who are interested in crime victim compensation.

In addition to the newsletter, the Board introduced two other publications. A new brochure, printed in English and in Spanish, describes the compensation program and provides phone numbers for local victim witness assistance centers throughout the state. The Board also printed a bilingual (English/Spanish) pocket card with similar information designed for law enforcement officers to hand to victims at crime scenes. The materials are being distributed to victim witness assistance centers and law enforcement agencies statewide.

Third Anniversary of September 11 Attacks Commemorated

On September 18, the California September 11 Support Group observed the third anniversary of the terrorist attacks and held a support group meeting in Sacramento. Approximately 45 people attended the meeting. Board member Windie Scott attended the meeting and offered words of encouragement and support to survivors and victim family members. Family members and survivors reflected on their journey over the last three years and on what has helped them in their healing process.

The final support group meeting is tentatively scheduled for December 11 in Southern California. The federal grant which funds the meetings will expire on December 31, 2004. Group facilitators will work with everyone to encourage them to continue planning support group meetings on their own.

Executive Officer Attends California Performance Review (CPR) Commission Hearing

Executive Officer Karen McGagin attended the public hearing on the CPR recommendations for Corrections Reform and Public Safety on Friday, September 10 in Long Beach. During the portion of the day devoted to Homeland Security and Public Safety, Nancy O'Malley, Chief Assistant District Attorney of Alameda County, provided testimony supporting the CPR recommendation to create a Division of Victim Services within the proposed Department of Homeland Security and Public Safety as part of an afternoon panel on the Public Safety recommendations.

New Format for Activity Reports

Beginning with the Board Meeting on October 22, 2004, the Victim Compensation Program and Government Claims Program activity reports will appear quarterly. The year end reports for Fiscal Year (FY) 2003-2004 will be presented at the October meeting, along with the report for the first quarter of FY 2004-2005, which covers July through September 2004.